

ENTREVISTAS

INTERVIEW TO ESTEBAN HERNÁNDEZ ESTEVE CONDUCTED

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- **Would you please tell us something about Esteban Hernández Esteve's private life with your own sentences from past to today?**

I am afraid that my private life is very simple and shows no relevant events. I was born in Barcelona on 24 September 1931. In 1935, I moved with my parents to Lerida because of professional affairs of my father. We spent there the time of the Spanish Civil War. In 1942 we moved again, this time to Badalona, a city near to Barcelona, also because of professional matters of my father. There I began my secondary studies. In 1947 I entered to work at the Banco de Vizcaya and continued my studies as a free pupil, that is to say, as a pupil who does not attend the classes but takes the examinations. In 1954, I took my degree as a Master of Science in Business Administration at the Superior School of Commercial Sciences of Barcelona. This same year I won the public corresponding competitive examination and joined the managerial corps of the Bank of Spain, i.e., the Spanish Central Bank. In the free time, I increased my English knowledge at the British Institute in Barcelona



Prof. Güvemli with Esteban Hernández and his wife Ingrid and my Italian at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in the same city. In 1955, the Italian Embassy in Madrid convened an essays competition on the poet Giovanni Pascoli to commemorate his Centenary. I won the first prize and obtained a scholarship to study at the Perugia University during the summer of 1956. At those times, Spain was a rather isolated country, with little contact with foreign lands. My stay at the University of Perugia was as the wide opening of a big window. After having lived this experience I felt the pressing need to go abroad to further my studies at a foreign university.

Following summer I went to London and tried to be admitted at the London School of Economics in order to do my doctorate in Economics. It was not possible this year because of some registration problems. Then I decided to get my doctorate in Germany taking the opportunity that I had a childhood friend studying industrial engineering in Cologne. Therefore, I obtained an extended leave of absence from the Bank of Spain, went to Cologne in October 1958, and registered at the Universität zu Köln for the doctorate courses. As I had

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no resources, I had to earn my life and managed to be appointed as a lecturer in Spanish at the Universität. 1964 I obtained my doctor's degree in Economics in the speciality of Economic history. Consequently, I left my position as lecturer, married Ingrid, the girl who has become my fiancée during my studies in Germany, and returned to Spain, getting back to my position at the Bank of Spain, which assigned me to its Economic Research Department in Madrid. We still live in Madrid and we have had five children in our matrimony, who have given us until now ten grandchildren.

- **How and why did you consider working on accounting history? Would you please tell us what made you to acquaint with accounting history?**

When I returned to the Bank of Spain in 1964 to perform my full time duties as an economist at the Research Department, I managed to combine these duties with a part time dedication as an associate professor at the Universidad Complutense of Madrid, where I taught Economics and Economic history. In 1972, I became Executive director of the Bank of Spain and had to choose between my career at the Bank and the University. I chose obviously the Bank. Following years were very intensive and interesting. I worked very hard with full, almost obsessive dedication to the Bank of Spain, without looking at office hours. I had learned a lot in Germany and wanted to instil the German sense of efficiency, systematic and excellence into the Bank of Spain. My efforts were rewarded. In 1975, I was appointed General Administrator of the Bank and in 1982, Deputy Director General. This is the highest administrative position at the Bank. Higher positions are politically appointed.

However, as time went by I began to be nostalgic for academic life and above all for scientific research. Then I began to read again the authors who had most impressed me during my doctorate and I came to Raymond De Roover. I knew well the writings of De Roover, but I did not know that he had begun his academic career as an accounting historian. Through his writings on accounting history, I discovered the potential and possibilities of this discipline. I contacted José María González Ferrando, the most senior of the Spanish researchers in accounting history and he informed me of the existence of the Academy of Accounting Historians. It was 1980. I attended the *Third World Congress of Accounting Historians* held in London. There I had the opportunity to meet Basil Yamey, Paul Garner, Gary John Previts, Pierre Jouanique, Ernest Stevelinck, Carlo Antinori, Tito Antoni, David Forrester, and many other distinguished accounting historians, and I was definitively gained by accounting history.

- **What are the milestones in your life as an accounting historian? Would you tell us about the people, events and time as the turning points?**

On my return from London I wrote my book *Contribución al estudio de la historiografía contable en España* (Contribution to the study of accounting historiography in Spain), published by the Bank of Spain, Research Department, in Madrid, 1981. I presented a short summary of it at the *Fourth Annual Congress of the European Accounting Association* held in Barcelona this same year. This was my first publication on accounting history and it had a rather major impact on the Spanish accountants' circles. The time was ripe and accountants felt a latent internal need to know something more about the history of their profession. In this

way, the book seemed to be the starting gun that awoke a renewed interest in accounting history.

At that point, I had already some experience in researching and publishing. In 1964, I published in German my doctoral dissertation presented at the University of Cologne, at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology, Department of Economic History. The subject matter of my dissertation was: *Die Arbeit und die Azteken. Versuch einer wirtschaftssoziologischen Analyse der Arbeit bei den Azteken und ihrer Eingliederung in wirtschaftliche Kategorien*. This is in English more or less as follows: "The Work and the Aztecs. An analysis of conceptions and conditions of work amongst the Aztecs, seen from an economic and sociological angle. Classification of them in economic categories". As said above, before making my doctorate I had obtained my degree as a Master of Science in Business Administration in Barcelona. During the course of my doctor studies (six years) I was lecturer in Spanish at the "Hoehere Fachschule fuer Dolmetscher und Uebersetzer der Stadt Koeln", i.e., "Higher School for Interpreters and Translators of the Cologne City", that forms part of the University. I chose the subject matter of my dissertation because I had a great concern in those times for the questions regarding to relativism. In special for the question whether concepts, attitudes, ethics are always a result of chance and custom, or, on the contrary, whether there are concepts which every in some degree matured culture develops in a similar way, arriving to the same conclusions. It was a difficult question, because there are very few sufficient developed cultures whose evolution has run independently of our Old World, that is to say, without having received any influence from Europe, Asia and Africa. In fact, I only could find two: the Aztec and Inca cultures. On the other side, the concept to be researched, if the answer had to be meaningful, ought to be a significant one in the economic sphere and in human life overall. Work seemed to me a pertinent concept for this purpose. Moreover, I wanted not only to know the ideas of the Aztecs about work, as well as their formation process, but also to observe how they were put into practice. All of this gave as a result the subject matter of my dissertation: the world of the work among the Aztecs. On the other hand, the German university, with its academic freedom and the possibility to hear professors of different subjects and Faculties, offered an excellent opportunity to carry out such a work. In view of all of this, I decided to face the challenge. It was a long, very fascinating and formative adventure, which obliged me to look far beyond my previous formation in business administration. Actually, I had to deal with philosophy, sociology, cultural anthropology, linguistic, etc., besides economics and economic history, of course. I had even to learn Nahuatl to some extent, that is, the language of the Aztecs, in order to be able to read the indigenous sources written by Aztec prominent people immediately after the Spanish conquest. They profited the sudden and unexpected arrival of a phonetic alphabet, our Roman alphabet, to write chronicles of their folk history and way of life. To do that they applied the characters of Roman alphabet without further ceremony to transcribe the Aztec sounds. In this way, we could receive as a precious heritage the knowledge of the Aztecs' history, customs, ideas, culture, etc., that in other case would have disappeared little by little, since the Aztecs only knew hieroglyphic writing.

After my return to Spain from Germany, I also published a few books and papers on financial matters. Probably the most significant of them are the book *Estructura y funciones de la banca en los países socialistas* (Structure and functions of banking in socialist countries),

Ariel, Barcelona, 1970 and the paper "Actividad económica y sistema financiero" (Economic activity and financial system), in *Revista de Economía Política*, no. 54, January-April 1970.

When I went to London to attend the *Third World Congress of Accounting Historians* I did have therefore already some experience in researching and publishing. However, I had never felt the eagerness to know, to research and to write that I felt when I discovered the great potential and possibilities of accounting history. As mentioned before, this discovery took place through the reading of De Roover's and other authors' (Yamey, Peragallo, Antinori, Jouanique, etc.) works.

In the following years I participated actively in all congresses and meetings open to accounting history papers. There were no many events of this nature. Only the *World Congresses of Accounting Historians* organized under the coverage of The Academy of Accounting Historians every four years, the parallel sessions of the *European Accounting Association Annual Congresses*, and the *Journées d'Histoire du Droit*, convened yearly by the Société d'Histoire du Droit, of Paris.

I was lucky enough to see that my efforts were very soon appreciated. At the *Fourth World Congress of Accounting Historians* held in Rome in 1984, I received the Hourglass Award. It was the first time that this important distinction of The Academy of Accounting Historians was granted to a non-English-speaking scholar. I felt very honoured and encouraged, as well as completely integrated into the accounting historians ranks. Eleven years later, at the *1995 Academy Research Conference* held at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, a second Hourglass Award was granted to me. This was really a very great honour because only three accounting historians have received this Prize twice: Basil Yamey, Stephen Zeff and I.

This same year, 1995, the Ilustre Colegio Central de Titulados Mercantiles y Empresariales (Official Spanish Association of Masters in Business Administration) designated me as the Economist of the Year.

In 2000, I was elected as a member by the Real Academia de Ciencias Económicas y Financieras (Spanish Royal Academy of Economic and Financial Sciences).

In 2002, the British journal *Accounting, Business and Financial History* published a *Festschrift* in my honour. This was also a great distinction, since this journal had previously only devoted one *Festschrift* to Basil Yamey.

Also in 2002, the Autonomous University of Madrid designated me as Honorary Professor.

These are the main landmarks that have punctuated my career as accounting historian and stimulated my activity in this sense, by showing that my work was appreciated in some way by my colleagues and by dispelling to some extent the doubts that everybody has with regard to the worth of the own performance

- **Would you generally tell us which are your working principles and philosophy at accounting history? As it is seen the 16th and 17th centuries are extensively used in your accounting history works. Why did you persist on this period? Which are the reasons? In addition, may I learn about the general content of these studies?**

As I have explained, I engaged in accounting history after having being trained as economic historian. In this respect, I followed therefore to some extent a reverse way to the one made by Raymond De Roover. He passed from commercial studies to accounting history and from accounting history to economic history. On the contrary, I passed from my studies in business administration to economic history and from economic history to accounting history, although certainly without leaving aside my interest in economic history.

Coming from the field of economic history it will not sound strange that I consider accounting history as a part or a sub discipline of economic history. It is just in this sense that I have spoken of the great potential and possibilities of accounting history. I think that accounting history is a part of economic history for two main reasons: firstly, because accounting function is to measure, record, control and inform of economic activities. Therefore, if accounting belongs to economics, its correlate accounting history also forms part of economic history. Secondly, because accounting history is a way to approach some researches into economic history subjects, as we shall see at once.

Research into accounting history has certainly very interesting facets. For instance, evolution of accounting techniques and its causes, a subject that can be studied through account books and documents as well as through accounting treatises; use of accounting by the different types of entities; forming and evolution of accounting thought; accounting normative with the corresponding accounting frames; development of the accounting profession; life and work of leading personalities in accounting; forming processes and actuation of accounting lobbies; accounting history taxonomy; origin and evolution of accounting epistemology and methodology; etc. All these facets have to be studied and are really very worthy subjects. All of them belong to what could be called the strict field of accounting history.

However, in my opinion, the accounting historian would make a tremendous mistake if he would want to remain within the narrow limits of what is properly accounting history *stricto sensu*, ignoring deliberately the capacity of the discipline as a specific approach to economic history subjects through the research into accounting books and documentation.

In fact, the great majority of economic historians are not very familiarized with accounting techniques. Surely, some of them have used books of accounts as simple data sources in their investigations. However, that is all in most cases. They do not dare to go in any depth into the immense wealth of relationships that the accounting documentation offers with matchless precision and exactitude. Their ignorance of accounting techniques and processes prevents them to profit for their research from all the information contained in the books of accounts and other accounting documentation.

For this reason, many important topics regarding economic history with involvements in other fields of human life, such as political, military, social, religious or cultural have been studied and explained in an incomplete and unsatisfactory way. In spite of it, perhaps many account books that could cast light on these topics remain forgotten on the bookshelves of the

archives. All over the world are old account books unexplored and covered in dusts awaiting the arrival of an accounting historian.

Because, in fact, nobody can study and interpret the contents of historical books of accounts with more knowledge and depth than accounting historians do, since they are experts in accounting. In consequence, accounting historians should not be happy to limit themselves to the study of formal and external aspects of account books, such as recording techniques and procedures. Certainly, they have to study these aspects, but they have to go far beyond it: they have to describe, analyze and interpret the operations recorded in the accounting documentation, placing their studies into the pertinent context.

Surely, the preparation to do this task requires some effort, not too much, anyway. The accounting historian would have to learn palaeography and to go into a technical historiographical training with regard to critical examination of sources, the selection of particulars from the authentic materials, the synthesis of particulars into a narrative, which will stand the test of critical methods, and so on. However, the effort would be worthwhile.

If a meaningful part of accounting historians understands their discipline in this way, I am convinced that accounting history will have a splendid future.

In any case, my words do not represent a great novelty. This way to understand accounting history has been surely somewhat neglected. However, some noted accounting historians have practiced the discipline in this way, following the example of Raymond De Roover. In my researches, if the subject matter under study is open to it, I also try to act in this way. That is, to study of course the accounting techniques and procedures used in the account books under consideration. But, in addition, to study the functions ascribed by the books owner to the accounting system implemented; to analyze the position of this system within the organization and the administrative procedures; to study the entity's philosophy and activities, etc., and above all to describe, analyze, and interpret the recorded operations within the context in which the entity stands. Let us see a couple of examples:

One of my first researches on accounting history was a study on a Journal and a Ledger of the Town Council of Medina de Rioseco of 1540. Medina de Rioseco was one of the three cities (the other two were Medina del Campo and Villalón) where took place the famous commercial and financial markets of Castile in the late Middle Ages. The account books under study were specifically devoted to record the loans that the inhabitants of the city granted to the Town Council in order to purchase corn in a year of great scarcity in Castile. The study of the properly historical accounting aspects was combined with the study of bread consumption per inhabitant in a Castilian city at that time. I studied also questions such as wheat prices in the numerous parts of Spain where corn was acquired, transportation costs, corn warehouses administration in Medina de Rioseco, bread prices, social classes and status groups within the population of the city, social care afforded by the Town Council to the needy, procedures of bread supply in the Castilian cities and so on.

A similar approach was made in the study of a Ledger of 1536-1537 containing the operations of the meat purveyor of Burgos. Burgos is an important city in North Castile where the trade of sheep for exportation on the part of the Mesta, i.e., the society composed of all the sheep raisers of Castile, was concentrated. Despite of this fact, the year under study the pasture of the area became meagre because lack of rain and the town meat purveyor had to acquire sheep in other areas. The study of properly historical accounting aspects of the Ledger

was combined with the study of meat consumption per inhabitant in a Castilian city at that time, sheep prices in the numerous parts of Spain where they were acquired, transportation costs, wages paid to shepherds, procedures of meat supply in Castilian cities; slaughterhouse functioning and meat shops in Burgos, prices of the different qualities of meat and so on.

Lastly, the study of the accounts of Fernán López del Campo, first “Factor General” of Philip II for the Kingdoms of Spain (1556-1560), gave me the opportunity not only to analyze from a technical angle the interesting accounting system implemented but also the financing sources and the expenses, entry by entry, in all detail, of the famous battles of St. Quintin and Gravelines that put an end to the war begun by France against Spain with the defeat of the former. Just in commemoration of St. Quintin battle, occurred on August 10, 1557, Philip II built the well-known monastery of El Escorial. Rivers of ink have been expended on these battles, but nothing was known about their cost and financing. Thank to an accounting history study every single detail is known nowadays.

Indeed, I have devoted a special attention to the Spanish accounting history of the 16th and 17th centuries. There are two main reasons for it. Firstly, that I was better familiarized with these centuries. Do not forget that mi doctoral dissertation dealt with the 16th century. One of the greatest difficulties that the historian finds to practice his office is to enter into the context of the period under study. That is, to get to know the cultural, social, economic, political, religious conditions of the time, to have understanding of the most relevant events and of their influence on the spirit of the period and the public mind, to be acquainted with the leading personalities, etc. Because of that, the historian develops a preference for the times he knows better. The second reason is that the 16th century is the time in which just happened in Spain the most significant accounting events. Amongst them we find the spreading of double entry accounting, the promulgation in Spain of the first laws in the world obliging all merchants and bankers to keep account books and to do it just by double entry, the introduction of double entry accounting for the first time in the world to keep the Central Accounts of a State Exchequer, the Spanish one... The 17th century, which anyway I have less frequented, is an extension of former period.

- **Would you please tell us which are the specific theories and methodologies that you have been using for your researches?**

As I have already declared, I am a trained economic historian. In addition, this training took place just at a German University, that is, a university in the country that gave birth to the renowned German Economic Historical Schools. These Schools were the Early School, with such significant scholars as Wilhelm G. F. Roscher, Bruno Hildebrand and Karl Knies; and the Younger School, with Gustav von Schmoller, Georg Friedrich Knapp, Ludwig Joseph Brentano, Karl Bücher and Adolph H. G. Wagner. The Last Generation of German Economic Historians with Werner Sombart, Arthur Spiethoff, Max Weber and Alfred Weber is not low-grade.

This means that I am, in principle, a traditional accounting historian and that I use the traditional historical theories and methods in my researches, although in this aspect I am fully open to all new ideas that come to enrich historical research.

In this respect, I always remember the words of my *Doktorvater*, that is, the director of my doctoral dissertation, the noted economic historian Hermann Kellenbenz. He told me at the beginning of my doctorate: “A research to be worthy must be a net contribution to the knowledge heritage gathered by society. To achieve this aim there are only two alternative ways: First, presenting new historical facts completely unknown until that moment; second, presenting a completely new view or explanation of already known facts”. These two ways just embraces the two extreme points between which history develops its activity: searching for new facts to present them to the scientific community and explaining the discovered facts.

As regards to the searching for new facts, I think that this is the primary task of historians. Because of that, always that the subject matter allows it, I orient my researches to the finding of primary sources in the archives. Then I present the facts that these sources reveal, describing and analyzing them. By doing it, I endeavour to achieve the most possible objectivity and, of course, not to introduce personal feelings or preferences into the exposition and analysis of the facts. I take always into account that full objectivity does not exist; it is a noble dream. Historians’ teachers explain that to their disciples as one of the first things. Objectivity is a method, a way, a will to reach an impossible goal. However, the making of this way leads us to get at a reasonable degree of objectivity. The sense of objectivity is to be able to communicate our knowledge to other people, that is to say, that the things that we know and are valid for us may also be valid for the others. Would not exist this minimal reasonable degree of objectivity, then science or, at least, social sciences, would have no sense, because knowledge would be valid only for the person who had gained it.

I also endeavour to separate carefully the description and analysis of the facts from the interpretation, that is, the explanation of these facts. This is a very important condition in historical expositions. Historians’ teachers also explain it with emphasis to their disciples at the beginning of the classes. That is so, because the exposition of the facts must be as objective as possible, while their interpretation is of subjective nature. The reader has to know what description, and analysis of the facts is, and what is interpretation, so that he can interpret the facts in his own way. The explanation of the facts can be done with the support of theories previously formulated or can emerge from the own nature of the facts described and analyzed, as well as from the combination of both ways. I prefer to search a *sui generis* interpretation of the facts, that is, an explanation based on their own essence and on their insertion on the scene under study. However, it is obvious that if there were explaining theories applicable to the facts presented, the historian would commit an omission if he would not consider them.

Finally, for the exposition of the facts within their corresponding context and explanation I use the narrative method, that is, the typical exposition method in history. According to the narrative method, the exposition consists of a main account in chronological order that does not exclude the presence of collateral accounts that flow into the main one.

- **How is about other methodologies? Which are the general methodologies that can be useful for the accounting history research? In addition, what should the researchers take into consideration while choosing the methodology for their works?**

As time goes by, logically new ideas and new points of view emerge with regard to the ways in which a science can be approached. The new ideas enrich the science and broaden its field. The same has happened in the framework of economic and social history. In 1929, Lucien Febvre together with his younger colleague Marc Bloch founded the *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, which gave name to the Annales School. This School championed a more dynamic and human history, embracing a “global” history that rejected all forms of pedantry and determinism. It also rejected the predominant emphasis on politics, diplomacy and war of many 19th century historians. Instead, they pioneered an approach to a study of long-term historical structures (*la longue durée*) over events. Geography, material culture, and what later Annalists called *mentalités*, or the psychology of the epoch, are also characteristic areas of study. Fernand Braudel, a Febvre’s disciple, became later one of the best known exponents of this School. Braudel’s work came to define a “second” era of Annales historiography and was very influential throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Because of its novelty the School members also called the new approach “new history”.

The same name received the economic history approach that emerged at the turn of the 1960s, sometimes referred to as *cliometrics* or *econometric history*, in the United States. The new approach involved the systematic application of economic theory and quantitative methods to economic history. In the “new economic history” there were besides the use of econometric methods also new theoretical insights, there were also new empirical discoveries with implications not fully elaborated, and there were finally revised interpretations of earlier results. It was typical product of post-modern thought. Prominent among the new economic historians were Robert Fogel and Douglas North.

As a derivative of the debate on the “new economic history”, around the middle of the 1980s emerged in our research field the “new accounting history”. It was also an outcome from postmodernism. Among the initiators and distinguished members of this movement can be mentioned Mahmoud Ezzamel, Trevor Hopper, K. W. Hoskin, Richard Laughlin, R. H. Macve, Peter Miller, C. J. Napier, etc., and in Spain Salvador Carmona. The ideas of the adherents to this approach lean to some extent on the Michel Foucault’s conceptions of knowledge as a tool of power.

The irruption of the new approach into the accounting historians’ circles generated a strong debate. As it usually happens in these cases, in order to assert themselves and to get a place, the new accounting historians came in with rather extreme positions. They called conventional the traditional accounting historians and branded them as antiquarian, practicing a collector’s love for erudition and for collecting dates and facts without significance. They labeled them, as well, as developing a mere narrative, describing history, instead of the critical, interpretive history that they themselves did. Their attitude was iconoclastic: old ideas were completely useless. One had to throw them in the garbage and start again at the beginning

Nowadays the new accounting historians' positions have calmed down and they tend to merge to some extent into the traditional ones at the time that traditional accounting historians adopt some interesting views contributed by the new ones. In this sense I welcome the emergence of new accounting history. It represents a progress factor in accounting history. The new ideas widen out the interest field of our discipline with the incorporation of very interesting elements of sociological nature. Their lack of faith in a continuous evolution, in a logical gradual process, towards progress under the pressure of external requirements also seems to me completely right. In other case, we would always be in the best of possible worlds. Any changes and discontinuities in the conditions of the subject matter under study have to be, therefore, carefully analyzed because it could be not a consequence of the natural evolution, but the outcome of causes that have to be investigated and found out.

In fact, the new accounting history has come as a breath of fresh air that has incited us to rethink about several old considerations and not actual accretions added to the historiographical thought in the course of time.

But one has to be careful. It would not be advisable to take the new ideas as a whole, in a pack. There are still a few new historians who maintain some extreme or inappropriate positions. For instance, some of them consider that there is no possibility to achieve objectivity at any degree. Consequently, they have abandoned the research of events at all to devote themselves to a new interpretation of already known facts. This new interpretations are almost always supported by sociological theories, such as the theory of institutional change and the agency theory in its economic and sociological aspects, being the latter a derivative of class struggle.

In general, curiously enough, this preference for facts interpretation with regard to the research into events is also shared by the new accounting historians who do research facts in the archives and present them. However, in this process they tend to announce at the beginning of the exposition that they will research into the facts in the light of a determined sociological theory. I fear that this is an inappropriate and full unnecessary self limitation. I have said above that, of course, if there is a theory, sociological, economic, and political or of any kind, that may explain the facts studied, the historian is obliged to know it and to take it into account. However, it is no reason to do it with an exclusive character. The historian has to do his work with no restrictions of any kind. His task is to explain the facts he studies at his best, from all possible points of view, and not only from one angle chosen in advance. At the very best, this would give a partial, incomplete explanation. On the other side, I am afraid that by doing this, we should, in some way, prostitute accounting history, because it would turn into a simple tool to verify theories.

Other weak point that I find in new accounting history is that it leans consciously on an ideology. In fact, the new accounting history approach bases on the ideas of Jürgen Habermas, Herbert Marcuse, Georg Lukács and Michel Foucault. As a matter of principle I consider that no ideology has to interfere in historical research. If objectivity is a hard attainable goal as we have seen, -a complete impossible goal in the opinion of extreme new accounting historians-, what will we have to say if we mix the subject matter with ideological elements? But this is done, perhaps unconsciously, by a good number of new accounting historians in their researches, because class struggle is the not always confessed starting point of the new accounting history credo. In such a way, accounting is looked at as an instrument

of domination (the Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon* mentioned by Michel Foucault), that is, a system of control, of forcing the employees and workers to work at full capacity, of keeping quiet the subjects... Well, I think that Karl Marx had a brilliant intuition when he divided society into two different economic classes: the *proletariat* and the *bourgeoisie*, according to their relationship to the means of production, two classes that were in permanent conflict against one another. I also believe that it was brilliant to see in the conflict between these two economic classes an important driving force in the occurrences in mankind's life. Domination is a basic instinct, which is inherent in man. If I remember rightly, Arthur Schopenhauer was one of the modern thinkers to express it more clearly. Therefore, this instinct is not only present in the relationships between *bourgeoisie* and *proletariat* but in all expressions of human life: family life, love relationships, religion, politics, social life, labor relations... Confining domination instinct to the *bourgeoisie* with regard to *proletariat* would be not only to explain the things partially but to disguise the reality. For this reason, to say as did Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, that "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle" seems to me a little exaggerated.

Be that as it may, picking up the thread of our narrative, to take the assumption that accounting serves primarily as a means to exploit the employees and workers as starting point of the researches, to place beforehand this proposition in the foreground of the investigations, to analyze all our findings from this perspective do not give the impression of a very scientific behavior. I believe that scientific researches are other thing, that they must be undertaken without prejudices. Whether in the concrete case that we at a time study accounting is used primarily as a means of exploitation or not is a work hypothesis that would have to be tested through the results of the investigation.

- **Would you please compare the methodologies used in accounting history with the ones used in other business/accounting researches? Differences, similarities, difficulties, etc.**

Accounting has been and is still considered a discipline forming part of several sciences. Every scholar determines which the prevalent science is for him according to the angle from which he contemplates accounting. Some authors consider it primarily as a mathematical science; others think that it is an economic science; others see it as a juridical one. According to the consideration taken into account the methods of research will vary. Also will vary the methods according to the approach adopted. Three of the preferred adopted approaches in recent times are the Positive accounting approach, the Normative accounting approach and the Empirical accounting approach. Richard Mattessich has dealt thoroughly with this subject. In parallel with these approaches, accounting experienced an important effort of axiomatization. Mattessich also played the leading role in this effort. More recently, another approach has emerged, the Behavioural and organizational accounting approach. Wai. F. Chua has distinguished in it three modalities: the Behavioural accounting, also called "experimental research", a modality that is dominated by traditional methodology and more often found in the U.S.A; Organizational accounting; and Critical radicalism. Accountants trained in Great Britain support predominantly the two latter modalities. They constitute the major counterweight to the methodology of Positive accounting theory. Both have a strong

preference for interpretive and critical perspectives, specially the Critical radicalism that gathers a relatively small group of accountants of the Marxian tradition. These authors hold the view that accounting is not a neutral or passive but an active instrument involved in social class conflict. They see accounting research as a social critique, emphasizing the inseparability of social, economic, and political interest. In view of this it is unnecessary to remark that this is the approach that gave birth to the new accounting history. Hence, the research methods followed by this approach marks the point of maximum coincidence of accounting methodology with the new accounting history one. In any case the coincidence is not so great. The historical research methods are rather *sui generis*.

- **How do you evaluate the existence and the importance of accounting history researches for/in the business and economic sciences?**

I think that the existence of accounting history is very important. In general, history has an enormous importance. It is the memory of society. Memory is what makes the identity of the persons. In fact, this identity is made up by the sum of remembrances of events, feelings, thoughts, knowledge, adventures, vicissitudes, difficulties, successes and failures, works... that we have lived through and gathered in our life. Can you imagine that you lose your memory? This would mean that you would lose automatically the consciousness of your identity... Taking the comparison so far, the same occurs with society as a whole and communities.

Just by this reason, the research into history is important because it shows us what we are, the way that we have gone to become what we are now. History is consequently the study of what we presently are. This is what Michel Foucault meant when he said that history is not a science of the past but of the present.

Thus, in comparison with this immense importance of history in general as a provider of identity, as a receptacle that contains our essence, all the concrete benefits usually listed by historians to justify their discipline lose importance. However, these benefits are also important, as we shall see in the answer of next question.

- **What can accounting history researches contribute to business life today? How?**

It is generally accepted that at a concrete level the study of the problems of the past can actually help us to solve present and future problems. It is also accepted that the study of the past accounting techniques can show us the way to implement new techniques by means of the exploration of ways not gone before. In the same way, the study and analysis of the mistakes made in the past will help us to avoid making the same or similar mistakes in the future. This are the main ways in which accounting history can contribute to business life.

In this respect, I should want to make a remark. It is common to associate accounting history with business. The association corresponds to reality. Business and accounting are intimately related, since merchants implemented the most sophisticated form of accounting, i.e., double entry accounting. In this way they could follow and to control better the course of their business. But we must not forget that accounting is also needed and used to record economic operations in other very wide and important fields: operations of the Exchequer and Public

sector in general; operations of religious institutions; operations of seigniorial dominions; operations of non-profit-making entities. All of these are very important institutions. I have cited above a couple of own investigations related to Public sector accounts and commented how these researches, besides the light shed on the accounting techniques and relationships, have illustrated some economic history aspects.

- **In recent time, there are several international conferences and congresses. Which are the reasons that accounting history field became international?**

The international expansion of accounting history in the last fifteen or twenty years constitutes really an extraordinary event. I ascribe this fact to the degree of maturity reached by accounting in the last third of the twenty century. When a discipline reaches a high level of development and recognition, the scholars who practiced it began to awake to an interest to know its history and the way it has done to become what it is at that moment. This is in my opinion what has also happened with regard to accounting.

- **What is your opinion about accounting history education? Do you think that it is necessary to integrate accounting history to the curriculum of accounting education at undergraduate or graduate levels?**

Yes, I think so. Would it not be necessary, it would be indeed very convenient. History shows how things have arrived to their present state and the vicissitudes gone through. The knowledge of accounting history would provide the students with a deeper insight into the discipline they study.

In our case, there is a further reason. Accounting is an instrumental discipline, and has a technical and aseptic character. Therefore, its study seems rather cut off from intellectual and cultural movements. This may be quite satisfactory for the students with a pragmatic point of view who think primarily in their professional future as accountants, but perhaps it is not so satisfactory for students with wider interests who want a more comprehensive formation and have a need to keep abreast of the current trends of intellectual and humanistic thinking. For them accounting history offers a fascinating and unexpected possibility to connect their accounting studies with social and human sciences.

- **What are your expectations for the future of accounting history field?**

I wish to be wrong, but I perceive in some countries a possible light cooling-off in the initial enthusiasm of last years. We must take into account that accounting history is not included in the academic syllabuses and that there are no official appointed accounting history professors at the universities. In such a status, accounting professors teach accounting history in passing in one or two lessons. They do it just for the fun of it and running the risk to appear eccentric because they do not devote all their time to more "serious" affairs. This is obviously not a very favourable situation for the promotion of accounting history research.

For this reason, I believe that it is urgent to attempt convincing academic authorities of the convenience of including accounting history in the curriculum of accounting and business studies in order to counterweight to some little extent its perhaps too pragmatic and instrumental character.

- **Lastly, what are your suggestions to the new generation of researchers for their accounting history studies?**

I would suggest them not to limit themselves to the study of the evolution of accounting techniques. This is an important matter that has to be studied: it constitutes properly the *raison d'être* of accounting history. However, beyond this study the accounting history scholar has another important task: the research into the operations recorded in the account books as well as the study of the organizational and administrative aspects of the entity owner of the records reflected in the books of accounts, as I have mentioned above. Nobody can do this task better than an accounting historian can. The efforts that he makes to be in conditions to do this task will be more than rewarded in terms of scientific satisfaction.